

GETTING AROUND DUXBURY (1885-1898)

By Gershom Bradford

Early in this period Shanks mare was popular. Everyone was obliged to go to the Post Office or depend upon friends. It was commonplace to walk 2 or 3 miles for a supper and evening.

There were 2 farmers, at least, who drove oxen -- Hiram Delano and Ed Simmons. We do not imply that these animals were used for social travel. The latter owner of oxen lived at Green Valley Farm, off West St., a lovely location with Malachi Brook running through it into the Millbrook Mill Pond. Where the outlet ran under Tremont St., there was a bypass where horses were driven to drink.

There were many horses, but they were both expensive to buy and to keep. A good horse cost \$100 and in the currency of that time it was a major investment. The keep for a horse with light work was about \$10 a month -- more work, more feed. The wife of an elderly couple told us that their horse cost as much as their own food. The \$10 was what we paid to keep our horse. If the horse proved satisfactory upon purchase, he became a member of the family for life. They did not change models every 3 years.

The main source of new horses was Chandler's stable in Plymouth. Chandler imported good western animals and they were a bargain, except for one drawback. Green horses, they were called, being susceptible to sickness, sometimes fatal. Should a purchaser choose to wait until the horse was acclimated the price went up. It would seem that if a green horse were kept warm and dry, not taken out in a rain for 2 months, he would survive.

We had all kinds of horses in town with the utilitarian animals predominating, useful in light business and moderate in driving.

There were a few "roaders" that would make 10 miles in an hour. They were used by doctors and gay blades who wanted to get around fast. Only one family is recalled that drove a span of driving horses -- the Wrights. They had a coachman, Joseph Holmes of Kingston drove a span and came over to Duxbury to see the fireworks on the 250th anniversary in 1887. He stopped for grandmother, mother and me. What a thrill it was for a boy of 8 to ride behind a span of horses.

There was about as much difference in the personality in horses as people. Sometimes there was a horse that would lower his head to help being bridled, while on the other extreme, we had one that would thrust his head at you with bared teeth as the barn door was opened. Many were reluctant to receive the bit. Who could blame them -- especially in cold weather. The trick was to take the head of the bridle in the right hand holding it up at the ears; then with the left hand holding the bit, slip your thumb into the back of his mouth between 2 teeth. He invariably opened his mouth.

Of the working vehicle the express wagon was the most popular -- the pickup truck of those days. It was a 4-wheel light wagon with sides about 10 inches high, a spring seat, no top. It gave ample space for a carpenter to carry some kegs of nails and a few needed boards. It served masons and others the same way. It also served to take its owner to and from work.

Probably Scott Freeman's and Ford's order carts had some protection for the groceries from the weather. The 5 gallons of kerosene had a piece of potato stuck in the spout to prevent a possibility of spraying the sugar.

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The conspicuous meat cart with its white top was a common sight. The meat was stowed up front and hauled back to a cutting block when serving a customer. The housewife would come out with a shawl over her head to make her selections. Children would come running to see if Mr. Marsh would cut them a thin slice of baloney. Oh, for the appetite of youth. Hanging below in the rear was a narrow box about 3 feet long, filled with brine and artificially lettered, "Corned Beef," as if no one knew its contents.

For heavy hauling there was the truck cart or wagon, with one or 2 horses. It was springless except for the driver's seat which did not spring much. It was a

jotting ride to Green Harbor for kelp. Its sides were removable leaving a flat bed. At haying time 6-foot stakes were set in sockets along the side of the body.

The tip cart had about half the capacity of the truck wagon. It was held in position by a hook and link; when the hook was turned so as to release the link, the cart dumped its load.

Turning to the driving vehicles, the most common was the box buggy. The body, as its name implies, was rectangular about 8 inches high, had a dash, one seat and room in back for a bucket of clams or a traveling bag. It was nicely varnished. The top folded back in good weather. At the foot of the dash there was a boot, which in stormy weather was unfolded and drawn up over the

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robe.

When the family became more numerous there was the carryall to accommodate them. It was merely an extended buggy with 2 seats and top over all. The passengers were protected by curtains that were removable. If a squall was threatening, the driver got out, unrolled and tried to secure the curtains. Usually by the time this was done he was drenched and the squall over.

If a citizen felt an impulse to ride in a more elaborate vehicle he acquired a Goddard buggy. The body lines were in harmony with its general elegance. The inside of the top was lined with golden brown broadcloth. It folded back only to a vertical position, allowing plenty of chance to see and be seen. The body painters were highly skilled in decorating the fancy vehicles with fine lines of gold and red. They had especially long haired brushes for the purpose.

The democrat wagon was an express wagon promoted to the front office, so to speak. The body about 8 inches high was nicely varnished, perhaps striped, comfortable springs. There were 2 seats, removable, but no top. Remove the rear seat and a trunk could be taken to the station. It was a very useful vehicle. Why democrat? We do not know.

The bicycle began to show up about 1890. In 1892 it is doubtful if there were 20 in town, but by 1897 the streets were alive with them.

In the summer of 1898 we were on a training cruise down Nova Scotia way. A letter was received stating that John Wright was running an automobile up and down Washington St. Then began the great revolution in Duxbury's mode of travel.